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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how an elementary school included parents in participative decision making to develop successful student-affairs programming. Including parents in the development of school activities mollifies complainers, creates opportunities for parent input, and facilitates innovation. Student-affairs programming offers an excellent beginning point for the implementation of shared decision making. Many parents may be uncomfortable making decisions about curriculum and instruction, but feel competent offering ideas and practical advice about student extracurricular activities. Such participation may serve as a springboard for greater participation in other areas. (LMI)

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Positive Student Affairs Through Shared Decision Making In Elementary School?? You Bet!!!

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Positive Student Affairs Through Shared Decision Making In Elementary School?? You Bet!!!

When people think of student affairs programming, they automatically think of secondary schools. The co-curricular and extracurricular activities are a vital part of every secondary school. But, elementary schools are different. When people think of elementary schools they think of neat little desks in neat little rows in colorful little rooms with teachers who have the love of Grandmother and the discipline of Attila the Hun ruling the scene. Extracurricular student affairs programming and elementary schools have not gone hand in hand.

But, those were the days of yesteryear. Today positive student affairs in elementary schools are not only progressing, they are rapidly becoming the norm. Elementary schools are actively seeking to involve the parents and the community on a day to day basis. At the same time, site based management is spreading the country. Site based management through shared decision making is one way of utilizing the community. An excellent first step is through the development of positive student affairs programming in the elementary schools.

When a school seeks to implement shared decision making, parents and other community members become a vital component in the success of the program. Shared decision making also lessens the decision making responsibility of the principal and shares the responsibility with others. Principals should not dread the prospect of shared decision making, but look forward to it as another means of generating new ideas and creating consensus and

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ownership in the school. When decisions are made by a collective set of faculty members, parents, and other community residents, everyone develops ownership in the ideas because they have not only helped to formulate them, but they have also created the plan of action. They have ownership in it. Anyone will work harder for a program or an idea if they feel the program is their own.

Student affairs in an elementary school is an excellent beginning point for the implementation of shared decision making. Many parents may not feel comfortable or competent yet to share in instructional or curriculum decisions. However, they do know if they think having a Story Book Character Day will be a good idea. They can give practical advice. They can give pros and cons to the idea of having every child dress up as a favorite story book character. They can be used as both devil's advocates and problem solvers. Do they think other parents will support the idea? Do they think children will be creative enough to come up with costuming ideas? Will cost be a factor? What characters could some children dress up as that would not necessitate the purchase of anything special? Some ideas they address will be more philosophical. What's the point of a Story Book Character Day anyway? How will the idea of a Story Book Character Day relate to the enhancement of reading? What will be the goals of the day, besides fun? How will they be implemented and enhanced? How will the day be evaluated? How can parents be utilized during the event? Parents add practicality and keep us in touch with the reality the families represent.

Having parents working on the development of new ideas can

help smooth out any obstacles that could come up to a new idea. For example, say a campus advisory committee comes up with the idea of sponsoring a Western Day to coincide with a local rodeo. Some people may hear about the plan and say the school is inadvertently sponsoring the rodeo. But, if the advisory committee has done it's planning well, it will have practical instructional answers ready before the plan is ever announced. Every avenue from both the school's standpoint as well as the community's will have been delved into, because each of those segments of the community will have been involved in the decision making process. Input should be sought throughout the community.

Shared decision making also serves to open up the school to the community. As the process develops, more and more parents and community members will feel they have real input into the operation of the school. Public school bashing has become a national past time. It's time to "put up or shut up." Site based management gives us the supreme chance to let chronic complainers put their ideas where their mouths are. If they think a certain program at the school is so bad, let's see them come up with a better way. Turn things around. If a chronic complainer causes continuous problems, put her on the advisory committee. Now let's see what she can do!!

Also let parents have full access to every rule and regulation the local, state, and federal governments hand down. Let them build a program within government regulations that they think will better meet the needs of the students. Everyone, including the school, should keep an open mind. If parents can come up with a

better way to address drug awareness than your Sock It To Drugs Day, great. Let's hear it. Planning student events may be less intimidating than planning student curriculum for even the most vocal of parent advocates. Let them have their say. After all, our ultimate goal should be the same: greater student success in every facet of children's lives.

The shared decision making committee can also be a springboard for greater actual parental participation in school activities. If parents have been involved in the development of plans for a Play Day, they are more likely to be there on the actual day, helping to make the day a success. Again, this provides parents the opportunity to let their walk match their talk. If parents want us to have all these special events, to make instruction applicable, let's see them provide the thought as well as the legwork to help get them done. Besides, they can have a good time along the way!

Site based management should not be something schools are afraid of. Ideally, it will give us the freedom and support we have longed for. Shared decision making can give us the instrument to involve those around us. It will make our schools more community centered. But, it will also take time, work, and cooperation on everyone's part.

Planning student affairs programs is an excellent beginning step. Elementary student affairs should always be fun as well as having educational benefit. All parents may not know a lot about curriculum development, but they do like to be involved in their children's education. They like to be involved in planning and goal setting. They like to see their children productive and

happy. Creating a positive student affairs program through shared decision making can tie all the pieces together. Can there be positive student affairs through shared decision making in elementary school??

You bet!!